

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



LARGEST SASSAFRAS TREE

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Do you know that the largest sassafras tree in all of New York State is located in Orleans County? Yes, that's right, and it's in the front lawn of the old church hall at Kenyonville in the Town of Carlton. Now in 1987 the tree is fifteen feet and ten inches in circumference about two feet above the ground. In 1955 it measured 62 feet tall and was three feet four inches in diameter at breast height. Occasionally these trees in southern states grow to be 80 to 90 feet high with a trunk nearly six feet in diameter.

The accompanying picture was taken in 1968 when a large branch had fallen from the tree and shows the neighbors of the great Kenyonville tree at that time. Left to right: Peter Barry, Mrs. Norman Barry, Miss Ruth Spaulding, Howard Barry, Wright Spaulding and Gordon Hoffman. Kneeling are Pam Culmo, Mrs. Gordon Hoffman, Mrs. Howard Barry and Marcia Barry.

The exact age of the tree is not known but it is guessed that it must now be over 150 years. In 1968 Miss Spaulding counted 117 rings on the fallen branch. That particular limb had been up high enough that the tree was probably a number of years old before the limb started growing.

Sassafras trees, no matter what size, are unusual because they have three different shapes of leaves. There is a single-ended one, one with two ends, sort of mitten-shaped, and a type with three ends. In autumn the foliage will have delicate blendings of yellow, orange and red. Back in the 19th Century people used to make sassafras tea from the bark or roots. The leaves when crushed in the palms of your hands leave quite a pungent but pleasant odor.

My sincere appreciation goes to Lysbeth Hoffman, Carlton Historian for help with facts contained in this story.